

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
IO-13 /079 W
-----126551 131243Z /43

P 122030Z JUL 78
FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1400
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0242

E.O. 11562: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: NO PLACE FOR LILIPUTIANS

1. UNION NATIONALE (UN) LEADER RODRIGUE BIRON ANNOUNCED
SURPRISINGLY COMPLETE VOLTE-FACE IN PARTY POLICY YESTERDAY
FOLLOWING TWO DAY MEETING OF PARTY'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS
HELD IN SECLUSION OF RURAL RETREAT NORTH OF QUEBEC CITY.
HENCEFORTH, UN WILL UNCONDITIONALLY SUPPORT CANADIAN UNITY
WITHIN CONTEXT OF RENEWED FEDERATION. IN A REFERENDUM, IT
WILL OPPOSE ALL QUESTIONS CONCERNING SEPARATISM OR QUEBEC
INDEPENDENCE AS WELL AS "ALL QUESTIONS WHICH FOLLOW THE SENSE
OF THE PQ PROGRAM."

2. PREVIOUSLY, BIRON HAD REFUSED TO COMMIT HIMSELF IN ADVANCE
TO A NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO ANY SORT OF QUESTION POSED BY THE PQ
IN A REFERENDUM. HE HAD ALSO LED HIS PARTY IN SUPPORTING PQ
SPONSORED LEGISLATION IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WHICH THE LIBERALS
HAD VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED. AS RESULT, OPPOSITION TO HIS BRAND OF
QUEBECOIS NATIONALISM HAS BEEN STIRRING WITHIN PARTY WHICH
HAS NEVER COMPLETELY ACCEPTED HIM AS LEADER. FIRST MAJOR
DEFECTION OCCURRED WHEN UN'S SOLE ANGLOPHONE REPRESENTATIVE
IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY LEFT PARTY IN PROTEST AGAINST BIRON'S
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SHIFT TOWARDS SUPPORT FOR PQ LANGUAGE POLICY. DURING 1976
ELECTION CAMPAIGN, BIRON HAD ATTRACTED SIZABLE ANGLOPHONE
AND ETHNIC SUPPORT FOR UN BY APPARENT SUPPORT FOR LINGUISTIC
"FREE CHOICE" IN EDUCATION. SINCE ELECTION, BIRON HAS ATTEMPTED
SHIFT GROUND IN HOPES OF ENLARGING UN'S SUPPORT AMONGST
NATIONALIST FRANCOPHONES BY POSING AS VAGUELY FEDERALIST
ALTERNATIVE TO PQ. THIS TACTIC ENJOYED NO SUCCESS. UN HAS

LOST ITS ANGLO SUPPORT WHILE FAILING TO ATTRACT SIGNIFICANT
ADDITIONAL FRANCOPHONE ADHERENCE.

3. DISGRUNTLEMENT WITHIN UN CAUCUS FINALLY CAME TO HEAD WITH
PUBLICATION OF RADIO CANADA'S PUBLIC OPINION POLL RESULTS SHOWING
DRAMATIC DECLINE IN SUPPORT FOR UN (SEE QUEBEC 0217), AND,
MOST RECENTLY, WITH "NOTRE DAME DE GRACE" BYELECTION IN WHICH
UN CANDIDATE WAS VIRTUALLY WIPED OUT. (SEE QUEBEC 0229)

4. COMMENT: POLARIZATION OF POLITICS IN QUEBEC IS NOW ALMOST
COMPLETE. PRIOR TO REVIVAL OF LIBERAL PARTY WITH CHOICE OF
CLAUDE RYAN AS LEADER WITH CONVINCING QUEBECOIS NATIONALIST
CREDENTIALS OF HIS OWN, THERE MAY HAVE BEEN PLAUSIBLE ROLE FOR
THIRD PARTY. THIS IS NO LONGER CASE. QUEBECOIS OF ALL STRIPES
INCREASINGLY VIEW STRUGGLE WHICH IS SHAPING UP AS TIME OF
NATIONAL DECISION IN WHICH THEY MUST DECIDE BETWEEN BASIC
CONSTITUTIONAL ALTERNATIVES. IN SUCH A CONTEST, FEW SEE ANY
PLACE FOR THIRD PARTY WHICH WOULD AGAIN ONLY TEND DIVIDE AND
WEAKEN FEDERALIST SIDE. MOREOVER, MIDDLE GROUND, WHICH BIRON
HAD HOPED OCCUPY, IS NOW BEING COOPTED BY RYAN. HE IS MOVING
INTO GROUND BETWEEN LEVESQUE AND TRUDEAU. THE NEW LIBERAL LEADER
IS PRESENTING HIMSELF AND HIS PARTY AS AUTHENTICALLY QUEBECOIS
AND AS PRIMARY CHAMPION OF A STRUCTURAL CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION
BETWEEN TRUDEAU'S CENTRALIST OPTION AND SEPARATISM. THERE SIMPLY
IS NO ROOM LEFT FOR A FOURTH ALTERNATIVE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARTY LINE, NATIONALISM
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978QUEBEC00242
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DG ALTERED
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780287-0140
Format: TEL
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780769/aaaacfuz.tel
Line Count: 94
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: a83e0477-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2034471
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NO PLACE FOR LILIPUTIANS
TAGS: PINT, CA, UN, UNION NATIONALE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a83e0477-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014